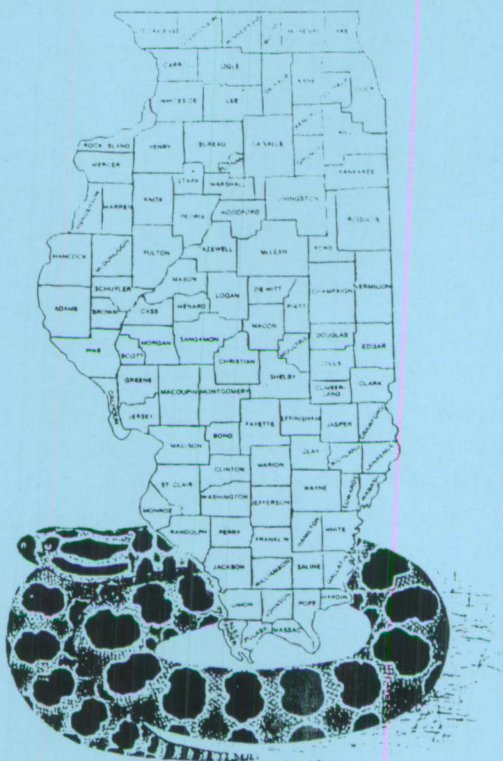


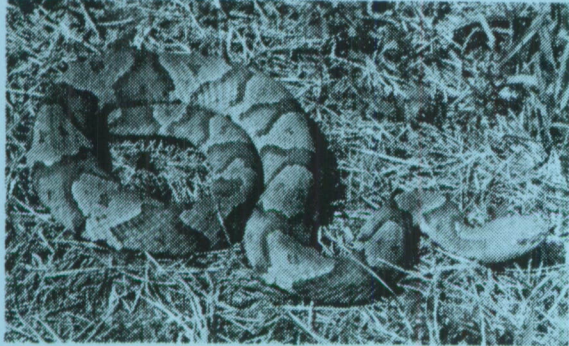
SNAKES OF ILLINOIS



Text and illustrations by:
Scott R. Ballard

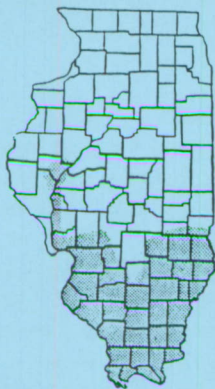
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Illinois is home to 39 different species of snakes. Some are quite common, while others are very rare. Only 4 of the 39 species are venomous. Ten species are listed as state endangered or threatened.



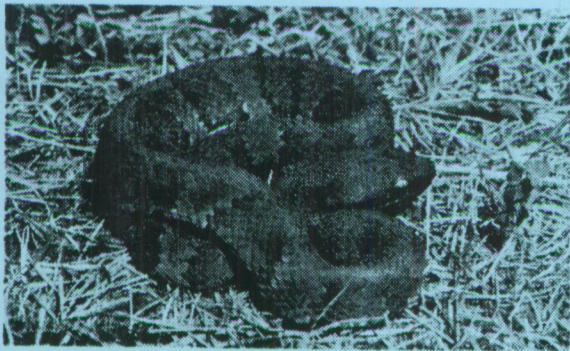
Saline Co., IL specimen

NORTHERN
and
SOUTHERN
COPPERHEAD



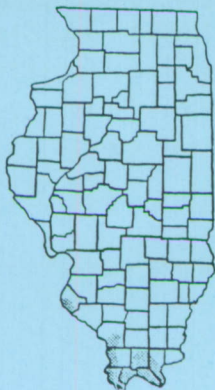
Kentucky specimen

TIMBER
RATTLESNAKE



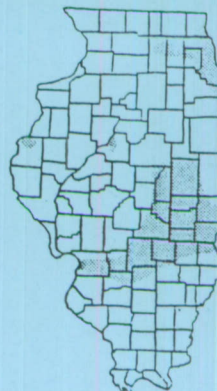
Louisiana specimen

COTTONMOUTH
WATER
MOCCASIN



Michigan specimen

EASTERN
MASSASAUGA
RATTLESNAKE



Snakes are probably some of the most feared creatures in the animal kingdom. Many of these fears come from misinformation or a lack of information.

Snakes and other reptiles are poikilothermic (cold-blooded). This means that their body temperature is the same temperature as their surroundings. Their bodies are covered with scales. Even though they are cold to the touch, snakes are not slimy. Snakes do not have eyelids or ears, so they cannot blink or hear, although they can feel vibrations in the ground through their belly. The tongue of a snake cannot sting you. It is used to detect odors in the air and to locate prey.

Snakes are very beneficial in keeping rodents and some insect pests under control. In a study done on western rattlesnakes, it was found that an average-sized snake could eat 9 pounds of rodents each year!!

Because a snake's outer skin does not grow with the snake, it becomes necessary to shed it periodically. On the average, a snake will shed 2-4 times a year, depending on how much food is eaten.

During the winter months, snakes hibernate below the frostline in the ground, living only off the fat stored from eating during the warmer months. In springtime, snakes emerge from hibernation to find mates and breed. Egg-laying species lay their eggs in the summer, and the young hatch out in the fall. Live-bearing species also give birth to their young in the fall. Since snakes do not show any maternal care, the young must fend for themselves.

Most snakes are not aggressive towards humans. They will, however, vibrate their tail and flatten their head when cornered to give the appearance of being venomous. This behavior saves many of them from larger predators that are fooled. Snakes, like other wild animals, may bite if threatened.

Overcoming fears and prejudices about these misunderstood creatures is a first step in learning

how beneficial they are. Allowing them to co-exist with man benefits us all.

STATE ENDANGERED/THREATENED SNAKES

Kirtland's Snake
Timber Rattlesnake
Great Plains Rat Snake
Western Hognose Snake
Eastern Coachwhip
Mississippi Green Water Snake
Broad-banded Water Snake
Eastern Massasauga
Flathead Snake
Eastern Ribbon Snake

Current studies and evaluations may very well add more species to the list in the near future. Reptile conservation and habitat preservation is crucial so that we do not lose these very important native inhabitants.

ILLINOIS' VENOMOUS SNAKES

The four species of venomous snakes in Illinois are the Northern/Southern Copperhead, Cottonmouth Water Moccasin, Timber Rattlesnake, and Massasauga Rattlesnake. Three characteristics they share are:

- (1) an elliptical cat-like pupil
- (2) a heat-sensing pit on each side of the head in between the eye and the nostril
- (3) a single row of scales on the underside of the tail (non-venomous snakes possess a divided row of scales there).

When in venomous snake country, watch where you walk. Bites in the field most often occur when a venomous snake is picked up, stepped on, or cornered. Most snakebites in the United States involve people working with them in captivity. Of those bitten in the U.S., less than 1/10 of one percent die. More people are killed each year by bee stings and being struck by lightning. If you encounter a venomous snake in the wild, just LEAVE IT

ALONE. The venomous snakes in Illinois are not aggressive, and will not come after you.

The range maps in this pamphlet are based on actual specimens taken, and not hearsay records. The actual specimens represent both historical and recent records.

SNAKE CONTROL

Even though snakes are very effective at keeping rodents and some insect pests under control, and aren't aggressive towards humans, it can still be startling to come upon one unexpectedly in the field or your yard.

If you would rather not be surprised some day by a snake in your garden or yard, there are three things you can do to minimize the chances of that happening:

- (1) Keep your lawn mowed regularly. Tall grass can be good habitat for snakes.
- (2) Keep woodpiles off the ground. These make good nesting sites for rodents, which in turn attract snakes.
- (3) Keep the area around your house free of trash piles and rubbish. Mice, again, are attracted to these potential nesting sites, which in turn will attract snakes.

Keep in mind that even though you follow these steps, you may still get an occasional snake "just passing through". Don't be so quick to kill it. Give the snake 10-15 minutes, and it will be out of your way.

There are no real effective snake repellants. Pouring ammonia around your residence or spreading mothballs have been recent recommendations that just don't work. Since snakes utilize a different method of smelling than we do, these noxious odors don't seem to affect them. The best way to keep snakes away from your home is to remove their habitat and food source.

CHECKLIST OF SNAKES OCCURRING IN ILLINOIS

Family Colubridae

Eastern Worm Snake (*Carphophis amoenus*)
Western Worm Snake (*Carphophis vermis*)
Scarlet Snake (*Cemophora coccinea*)
Kirtland's Snake (*Clonophis kirtlandii*)
Blue/Black Racer (*Coluber constrictor* ssp.)
Ringneck Snake (*Diadophis punctatus* ssp.)
Great Plains Rat Snake (*Elaphe guttata emoryi*)
Black/Gray Rat Snake (*Elaphe obsoleta* ssp.)
Fox Snake (*Elaphe vulpina*)
Mud Snake (*Farancia abacura*)
Western Hognose Snake (*Heterodon nasicus*)
Eastern Hognose Snake (*Heterodon platirhinos*)
Prairie Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis calligaster*)
Speckled/Black Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis getula* ssp.)
Eastern/Red Milksnake (*Lampropeltis triangulum* ssp.)
Eastern Coachwhip Snake (*Masticophis flagellum*)
Mississippi Green Water Snake (*Nerodia cyclopion*)
Yellowbelly/Copperbelly Water Snake (*Nerodia erythrogaster* ssp.)
Broad-banded Water Snake (*Nerodia fasciata*)
Diamondback Water Snake (*Nerodia rhombifer*)
Northern/Midland Water Snake (*Nerodia sipedon* ssp.)
Rough Green Snake (*Opheodrys aestivus*)
Smooth Green Snake (*Opheodrys vernalis*)
Bullsnake (*Pituophis melanoleucus*)
Graham's Crayfish Snake (*Regina grahami*)
Queen Snake (*Regina septemvittata*)
Brown Snake (*Storeria dekayi*)
Redbelly Snake (*Storeria occipitomaculata*)
Flathead Snake (*Tantilla gracilis*)
Western Ribbon Snake (*Thamnophis proximus*)
Plains Garter Snake (*Thamnophis radix*)
Eastern Ribbon Snake (*Thamnophis sauritus*)
Common Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis* ssp.)
Lined Snake (*Tropidoclonion lineatum*)
Earth Snake (*Virginia valeriae*)

Family Crotalidae

Northern/Southern Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix* ssp.)
Cottonmouth Water Moccasin (*Agkistrodon piscivorus*)
Timber Rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*)
Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake (*Sistrurus catenatus*)

SNAKES AND THE LAW IN ILLINOIS

If you wish to keep snakes as pets in Illinois, there are some regulations you should be aware of:

- It is illegal for a private individual to keep venomous snakes in captivity. They may only be kept in scientific, educational or research institutions by those trained to work with them.
- It is illegal for a private individual to keep a large boa or python in captivity.
- It is illegal to collect, kill, harass, buy, sell, or offer for sale any Copperbelly water snake.
- Those species listed as state-endangered or threatened may not be collected or kept in captivity without a permit from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.
- It is illegal to collect snakes or any wildlife from public land such as a state park, nature preserve, natural area, or national forest without a permit from the appropriate agency.
- It is illegal to kill or collect snakes (without a scientific collecting permit), except for land-owners or tenants on property on which they reside.
- It is illegal to capture alive more than 8 of any species per day, or have a total of more than 16 individuals of any native Illinois herpetofaunal species in captivity.
- It is illegal to buy, sell, trade, or barter any wild-caught Illinois herpetofauna or any of its parts or offspring for any commercial purpose.



In compliance with the Illinois Human Rights Act, the Illinois Constitution, Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the U.S. Constitution, the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, or disability. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility please contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, 524 S. Second Street, Springfield, IL 62701-1787, (217-782-7616) or the Office of Human Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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